



Scratches on the Face of Time

The newsletter of the Clarence Bicknell Association

N°3 - Autumn 2016

"The Marvels of Clarence Bicknell" is a short documentary, or biopic; the true story of Clarence Bicknell. He was born in 1842 in Herne Hill near London and died in 1918 in his summer house in Casterino, in the mountains near Tende. He left the church when he was 35 years old to become an out-of-the-ordinary botanist, artist, archaeologist, Esperantist and idealist in Bordighera on the Italian Riviera.

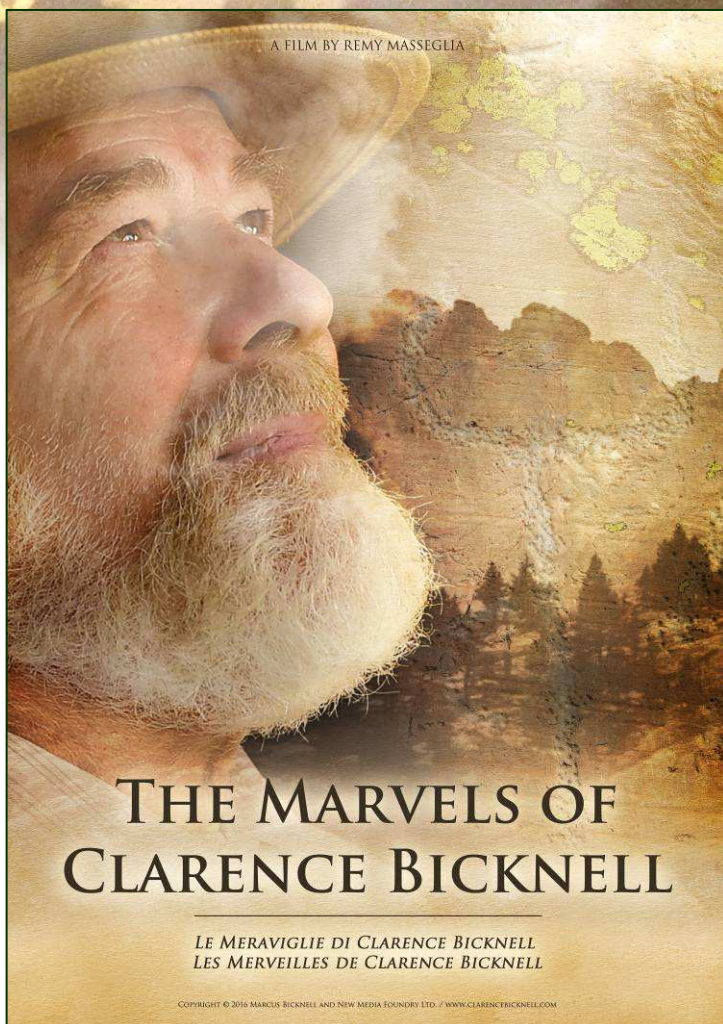
The 16 minute film, available with French, Italian, Esperanto and English soundtracks, shows Bicknell and his work in spectacular images of the landscape, the flora and his paintings. It is intended to be a pilot for a full-length documentary by an established TV broadcaster or production company and to be available to museums, interest groups and on the internet. Find the internet links on the home page of www.clarencebicknell.com.

Who originated the film?

Marcus Bicknell, a great grand-nephew of Bicknell, is the producer of the film and has commissioned the director and managed the concept, script, casting and finance. Susie his wife is assistant producer, costumes, continuity, note-taker and eye-on-the-ball expert. Marcus and his wife Susie have been students of Clarence Bicknell since the 1980s and look after much of the family collection of botanical water-colours, letters, books and illustrated albums. They also help run the international Clarence Bicknell Association and its team of researchers.

Who directed the film?

Marcus and Susie Bicknell met Rémy Masségia in 2012 with the Countess Roberta d'Alberti who had engaged him on her putative "Wild Flowers" art-classes-to-perfume-company initiative. Rémy in the meantime has been forging a reputation for visually-exciting short videos on high mountain biking, dance, comic theatre and education. Rémy is based in Breil-sur-Roya, a village in the steep valley of the Roya river which runs from our French sites (Casterino and Val Fontanalba) to our Italian one (Bordighera). He knows well the Val Fontanalba, the adjoining Vallée des Merveilles where Bicknell also discovered thousands of pre-historic Rock engravings, the flora and fauna



of the area, the park authorities and most of the locals. Rémy is director of the film but acts also as creative director, screen play editor and camera man.

Who plays the role of Clarence Bicknell in the film?

Marcus's cousin Renchi Bicknell plays the role of Clarence Bicknell. Renchi is a creative, spiritual and mild-spoken soul who not only looks like Clarence but has similar interests and instincts. Renchi painted a series of 365 pictures of flocking starlings on the marches of Glastonbury, one a day every day for a year, and a cycle of text and drawings of his circumnavigation of London's rural ring road, the M25. He has limited experience of acting but assimilates with Clarence so much that by taking on the role of Clarence in his mind he finds he can act the part convincingly. Six weeks earlier, he worked with Marcus on a day's filming in the Shropshire village of Stoke-upon-Tern where he was a priest in a high-Anglican-church sect the *Societa Sancti Spiritus* before coming to Italy; the experience guides Renchi in the Clarence role and highlights how effective the portrayal is even if Renchi is not speaking to camera.



Who else appears in the film?

Renchi's wife Vanessa Bicknell plays the cameo role of Alice Campbell, a mystery woman who was Clarence's companion in the latter years of his life. She is seen fleetingly and distantly with Clarence in three period photos. Vanessa and Susie found the black dress, white blouse, and white hat from the photos and brought the costumes from England. Renchi, or should we call him Clarence, brought a different costume. His white linen jacket and baggy slacks are what Clarence wore in the heat of Bordighera, while Marcus's heavy tweed Norfolk coat, knickerbockers, long woolly socks and hob-nailed boots are ready for the mountain scenes. We had a variety of props to complete each costume; the correct hat in each case, cravat or scarf with pin or toggle, green and gilt Esperanto badge, pocket watch, Clarence's treasured watch strap with green jade amulets and the metal badge of the *Societa Sancti Spiritus* and a six foot long walking pole. All the water-colour paintings, albums, pressed flowers, butterflies, rubbings of rock engravings, letters, books and Esperanto artefacts are originals created by Clarence Bicknell, either from the Museo Bicknell in Bordighera or from the Bicknell Family Collection.



Where was the film made?

Stoke-on-Tern (UK), Bordighera (Italy), Val Fontanalba and Casterino (France).

Bicknell lived in England until he was about 35. His family home at Herne Hill no longer exists - it's covered by a housing estate - and his first church at Walworth in south London no longer exists either. Some of the scenes at the beginning of the film there were therefore shot at his second church, in Stoke-on-Tern, a hamlet in Shropshire north of Shrewsbury in May 2016, by Marcus and Renchi alone.

Bordighera is the town on the Italian Riviera where Bicknell lived and worked from 1878 till his death in 1918 and where he created the Museo Bicknell which still today houses much of his work and is the backdrop to concerts, seminars and exhibitions.

The Val Fontanalba, in the high mountains of the Mercantour round the Mont Bego, is the site of the prehistoric rock engravings which are most associated with Bicknell. The high valley is accessible from the hamlet of Casterino at 2000 metres altitude where Bicknell spent his summers, from 1906

in the house which he built - the Casa Fontanalba. These mountains were in Italy in Bicknell's time but have been part of France since 1946.



Does Bicknell's Casa Fontanalba feature in the film?

No. The d'Alberti family, owners of the Casa Fontanalba which remains in good condition but closed to the public and the elements, did not accept our request to feature Bicknell's house in the film. He built it in 1905-1906 on their land under a lease which terminated officially at his death. The owners are concerned that publicity for the house would attract vandals and potential damage. So, up at Casterino, Rémy and the team located a house which has an uncanny resemblance to the Casa Fontanalba and where we got the okay to film, the Casa Barbara. The location, colouring and the terrace are all very similar to the Casa Fontanalba although we miss the arts-and-crafts decorations, painted shutters and fresco designs inside.

What equipment was used in the making of the film?

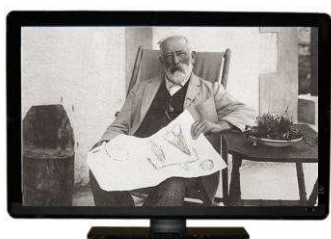
Rémy Masségli shot the film in HD1080 with a Nikon D810 digital SLR, a camera ideally-suited to shooting video, and a 3-axis gimbal-and-GPS-stabilised DGI Phantom 4 drone with high definition camera. All scenes were shot on location i.e. no studio was used. Rémy edited the film with Adobe Premiere Pro.



Who wrote the film?

Since 2013 the Clarence Bicknell Association and some of its key members have been researching aspects of Bicknell's life and work. Some of the research is oriented towards the researcher's own interests such as Marcus Bicknell's transcriptions of diaries and other documents in the Bicknell Family Collection, Helen Blanc-Francard's insights into the world in which Bicknell lived and Valerie Lester's in-depth work on original documents in Bordighera and the UK. It also includes Graham Avery's discovery in Geneva and Florence of hundreds of Bicknell's letters that reveal his network of European contacts, and his finding that dozens of botanical institutes in Europe and the USA hold plants from Bicknell in their collections. This research is published on the downloads page of www.clarencebicknell.com.

At the same time, all of the researchers fed information to Valerie Lester who is writing the first full-length biography of Bicknell for publication in time for the centenary of his death in



2018. Valerie is a descendant of Clarence's cousin Phiz, Dickens' illustrator, and she is therefore a cousin of Marcus and Renchi. Since completing her biography of the Italian printer and designer Bodoni she has been working at home near Boston USA and on the road with Susie and Marcus near London, in Cambridge, in Shropshire, in Walworth, in Tende, Casterino and Bordighera on finding out the aspects of Bicknell's life which have not previously been documented.

All this research plus Valerie's own research and creative input have informed the production team about the key aspects of Clarence's life and work. Marcus and Susie wrote the screenplay. Other researchers including Valerie corrected and improved it.

Is everything in the film historically accurate?

We have made an effort to ensure what is shown in the film would have been as it was in Bicknell's time. The narration is taken from sources written at the time of Bicknell, with a minimum of speculation or anecdotal stories handed down by those who did not actually know him.



How did the film get its name?

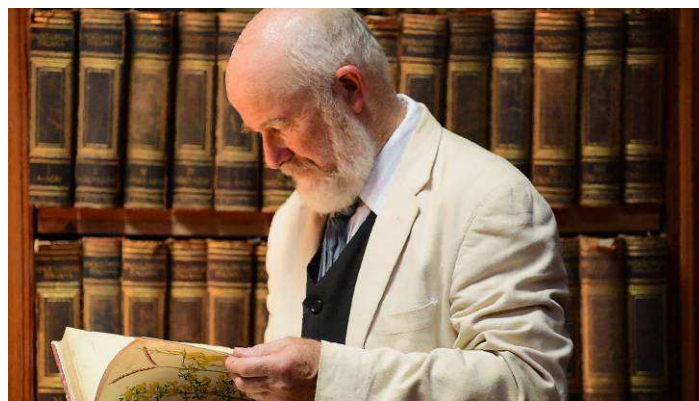
The film is titled "The Marvels of Clarence Bicknell" and similarly in French and Italian. The production team considered various generic phrases to go alongside the name Clarence Bicknell in the film title... "The Man of Marvels", "Renaissance Man", "A True Victorian", "Anglican Cleric who revealed an Ancient Culture" and similar phrases featured in the list.

"The Man of Marvels" or "L'Homme des Merveilles" is a well-used phrase, in fact, too well used. It also ties Bicknell to the geographical site of the Vallée des Merveilles, the principal site of the rock engravings he studied and published. However, Bicknell was the principal researcher of the neighbouring site, the Val Fontanalba, also part of the Massif du Mercantour around the Mont Bego, so "L'Homme des Merveilles" constricts the scope of his archaeological work. More importantly, the film is about all of Bicknell's "marvels", his belief, his botany, his art, his idealism etc. So, "The Marvels of Clarence Bicknell" uses the "marvels" word but distances it from a geographical connotation.

Which authorities helped make the film?

The film was funded by Susie and Marcus Bicknell with New Media Foundry Ltd, a company which they own. We warmly thank those that gave assistance, encouragement and authorisations...

- St Peters Church, Stoke on Tern
- The Shropshire Archive, Shrewsbury
- Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge



- British Museum, Natural History
- University of Genoa
- Collezione Museo Civico di Archaeologia, Genoa
- University of Nottingham
- University of Oxford Herbaria
- Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri, Museo Bicknell
- Ufficio Attività Culturali Bordighera
- Comune di Bordighera
- La Chiesa Anglicana, Bordighera
- Musée des Merveilles, Tende & Conseil Departmental des Alpes Maritimes
- Parc National du Mercantour
- Clarence Bicknell Association, the Bicknell family collection

What are the objectives of making the film?

Firstly, museums which feature Bicknell and his works have no video material to inform their visitors, so the film is available to them for screening on demand by visitors. The most relevant museums are the Museo Bicknell in Bordighera and the Musée des Merveilles in Tende, to whom the use of the video, in the various language versions, is offered free of charge. Those museums and academic institutions which hold events or exhibitions for the centenary will also be able to use this film. The film is part of a series of activities to celebrate the centenary 2018 of Bicknell's death; to maximize the impact of the events and to trigger interest in Bicknell at a wider public level, the film is available on social media and web sites like www.clarencebicknell.com.

Secondly, the film is a pilot which Marcus Bicknell and the core team can use to attract the attention of a major broadcaster or TV production company and persuade them to commit to a full scale documentary for international broadcast.

Why is Bicknell relevant today?

Bicknell's path is intertwined with artists like Turner, his cousin Phiz, intellectual sects of the Anglican Church, wanderlust of the Grand Tour, the scientific Renaissance of the end of the 19th century, the British on the Riviera, a network of researchers across Europe, and with charity and with idealism. In a



remarkable parallel with the explosion of free-spirited learning in that period, Bicknell threw off the dog collar and devoted himself to nature. He became an expert on flowers of the Riviera, painted accurate water-colours of them and published a highly-respected book on them. He then turned his skills to archaeology, discovering, copying and classifying thousands of rock engravings on the high rock slabs of the Vallee des Merveilles and the Val Fontanalba. He was one of the first scientists to devote his energies to providing a record from which future researchers could benefit. His self-taught techniques of recording and classifying finds, rather than jumping to conclusions, pre-dated the best modern techniques by 100 years. University researchers today use his material to put modern day earth sciences, geography, botany, culture and communication of scientific knowledge into focus.

Are we celebrating anything?

Yes. Clarence Bicknell died in 1918 so the centenary of his death will be in 2018. The Clarence Bicknell Association, the Bicknell family, researchers, university and museum are cooperating on making 2018 a year in which Bicknell's memory can be brought alive and further extended into the future.

A) The international Clarence Bicknell Association was itself set up in 2013 as a means to harnessing the energies of those that appreciate the man and what he did in his life.

B) Members of the Association have been working on new original research which is published on www.clarencebicknell.com at the downloads page.

C) This research has been intensified by Valerie Browne Lester, Bicknell's great grand niece, who is writing the first full biography of Clarence Bicknell, due for publication before 2018. More about Valerie and her books at <http://www.valerielester.com/>

D) The Bicknell family, in the persons of Susie and Marcus Bicknell, have been the driving force behind the new short documentary film on Clarence Bicknell, released at the end of September 2016 in four languages. The trailer is at www.vimeo.com/marcusbicknell/clarencebicknell. The film is not only a tool for museums, tourist organizations and websites for the promotion of Bicknell's life but is also a pilot for broadcasters to consider producing a full length documentary on Bicknell for television in various European countries.

E) Academic research into Bicknell and his place in modern studies is planned by groups of researchers, even though the large-scale multi-national research projects planned by the

University of Nottingham and the University of Genoa have not yet proceeded to the funding stage.

F) The film, the biography, items of Clarence's in the Bicknell family collection and new research can form the basis of exhibitions during 2016 in relevant museums and sites in Bordighera, Tende, Cambridge, Genoa and elsewhere.

Is the film linked to the upcoming biography?

A biography of Clarence Bicknell, due for publication before 2018, is at the research and initial writing stage by Valerie Browne Lester, specialist researcher and writer based in Boston. Valerie is the author of *Fasten Your Seat Belts! History and Heroism in the Pan Am Cabin* (1995), *Phiz, The Man Who Drew Dickens* (Chatto&Windus 2004), a biography of Hablot Knight Browne, Dickens's principal illustrator, and her biography of the great Italian printer *Giambattista Bodoni: His Life and His World* (David Godine, 2015).



She is also a descendant of Phiz, Charles Dickens' illustrator, who was Clarence Bicknell's uncle, so she's Marcus's cousin. A suitable company with a track record in multi-media exploitation (i.e. TV and print in this case) could take on both

the TV documentary and the book to be able to promote them together across several major markets. The timing of the biography, the television, new academic research, exhibitions

and other events will use the 2018 centenary of Clarence's death as a hook.

Read more about the film: "Renchi Go", the story of the making of the film, list of credits and other information is available on the downloads page of our web site.

For further information about the film please contact Marcus Bicknell, Chairman of the Clarence Bicknell Association, Homefarm Orchard, Kirby Close, Chalfont St Giles, Bucks HP8 4FF. Phone +44 1494 872751 mobile +44 7748 111444 email info@clarencebicknell.com skype mbicknell and on Facebook. Please contact us with your suggestions and expectations. Since there is growing interest in Clarence Bicknell in the United Kingdom, France and Italy, activities are promoted and conducted in several countries, and as far as possible in English, French, Italian and Esperanto. However, the scope of the initiative is not limited to these countries, and participation is invited on a worldwide basis. Your participation in the Association is invited (see [membership application form](#) and [payment methods](#) on our web site).

The Clarence Bicknell Association is seeking volunteers to complete the French, Italian and Esperanto versions of the web site. Thank you.



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